

Elijah P. Lovejoy: A Religious Abolitionist Leader

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Heroes throughout time have come in all shapes and sizes from all parts of the world.

Elijah Parish Lovejoy, born November 9, 1802, near Albion, Maine, was no exception to this rule. The eldest child of Reverend Daniel Lovejoy and his wife, Elizabeth, Elijah lived on a frontier farm that housed an extremely religious family of eight. To emphasize this fact, he was an intelligent child who learned to read at the young age of four through excerpts from the Bible. This idea of communication through written text would later be a reoccurring theme in Lovejoy's career. He went on to become a minister himself, but also a powerful anti-slavery editor. However, the idea of communicating through words was not the only thing that got him interested in journalism. Religion played a very important role as well. Had the religious conversion of Elijah P. Lovejoy not taken place, his journalistic approach to voicing his abolitionist views might not have even been thought of.

Although the articles he later became famous for were not written until years after, the time before Lovejoy's conversion was not held at a standstill. On the contrary, his life was kept busy and productive. The top of this long list of achievements begins with Lovejoy's move to St. Louis, Missouri, and the establishment of a private high school there. He wished to pattern it after the academies of the east coast to offer something better, in his opinion, to the St. Louis community. A while later, T. J. Miller, of the *St. Louis Times*, approached Elijah with the opportunity to become partner of his newspaper "for a journalistic career represented everything he most desired." It had been

an option he considered during childhood. Throughout Lovejoy's stay at the *Times*, he gained much practice criticizing certain people and events, most of which was directed at President Jackson, who he opposed at the time. However, at this stage in his life, Lovejoy was not yet passionate in this line of work and took a much longed for break. Some element crucial to his life had been missing.

It was at this point that Elijah experienced something outside himself. He underwent a religion conversion of which he wrote many letters to his parents and siblings who shared his immediate joy. Prior to this period of happiness, Elijah had been deeply depressed: "Sorrow had taken hold upon me, and a sense of my long career in sin and rebellion against God, lay heavy upon my soul. But it pleased God, and blesses be his holy name, to grant me, as I humbly hope, that very night joy and peace in believing." At this milestone in his life, Elijah felt empowered. This newfound strength granted him the chance to spread his knowledge to others. To achieve this feat, in 1831 he joined the First Presbyterian Church, where he decided to become a minister. Then he moved east to study at Princeton Theological Seminary. In April 1833, Lovejoy was licensed to preach, returned to St. Louis and started something that would eventually influence the lives of many—the *St. Louis Observer*. This newspaper began as a religious paper, but quickly became a voice against slavery. Because of his recent spiritual confidence, Elijah was passionate about getting others to believe and do the right thing, as he was trying to do. This, coupled with the natural writing talent he possessed, his paper became a collection of abolitionist editorials and articles.

Unfortunately, trouble arose. Many in the state of Missouri disapproved of abolitionist ideals. In response to seeing a slave burned at the stake, Lovejoy's editorials

started openly attacking slavery. Those that opposed him were instantly angered and wrecked his press in 1836. To their dismay, this did not stop Lovejoy from printing. He moved across the river to Alton, in the free state of Illinois, and tried to publish there as the editor of the *Alton Observer*. Regrettably, his printing press was destroyed several times, until finally a mob murdered Lovejoy on November 7, 1837. This was all in the name of protecting his views.

A man of great power and strength, Elijah P. Lovejoy wanted nothing except to get his point across. His goal in later life was to get others to convert to Presbyterianism and abolish slavery. He did this using the best means he knew how, through writing and religion. It was the latter that really influenced his thought process and beliefs. He is not alone in the world when it comes to this idea. Everyone is influenced by their environment. However, in Lovejoy's society it was a rare occasion when someone took the environment they lived in and tried to make it better for generations to come. Luckily for the world, he did just this and succeeded and beyond. [From Merton L. Dillon, *Elijah P. Lovejoy*; "Elijah Parish Lovejoy." <<http://www.he.net/~altonweb/history/lovejoy/>>. (Sept. 7, 2007); Beriah Green, *The Martyr: A Discourse in Commemoration of the Rev. Elijah P. Lovejoy*; and Henry Tanner, *The Martyrdom of Lovejoy; an account of the life, trials, and perils of Rev. Elijah P. Lovejoy.*]